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Interview with Aaron Reynolds

Aaron Reynolds

Kate Hitchcock

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ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

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Researcher's name: Kate Hitchcock
Event: Interview with Aaron Reynolds
Place: Alternative Center, Mount Vernon, Ohio
Date: September 28, 1999

K – This is Kate Hitchcock interviewing Aaron Reynolds, September 28, 1999, around 1 o'clock. Will you just start off with your name and basic biographical information?

A – The name's Aaron Reynolds. I work here at the Alternative Center. I graduated from Mt. Vernon Nazarine College back in '93. Pretty much since then I've been working as a substitute teacher, and a teacher too.

K – If you could just describe for me the general structure of the school – walk me through a day.

A – Through a day. Okay, most students arrive, roughly between 7:30 and quarter to 8, or 8 o'clock, depending on what bus system they're in. I'm usually here at 7:30. Keep them down in a generalized area on the main floor until 8:15. Then they are released to their teachers. From that time, the teachers have them from 8:15 to 8:30, and they'll be in their classrooms all day, but from 8:15 to 8:30 the teachers let them kind of do a little bit of talking, things like that. They get their lunch count in, things like that. At 8:30, most teachers pretty much shut it down – no more talking, get to work, and then throughout that day its structure, you know, different teachers have different formats that they go about teaching their kids. And from that day – from 8:30 to 11:30, pretty much class work. 11:30 is lunch, and then the afternoon teacher here kind of spread it out, what they want to do. They take them outside and let them, you know, have a little recess time, and get them set and wind and get some of the energy out, and things like that. Throughout the day, there's not a lot of talking, a lot of sleeping. It's pretty – it's very strict in format.

K – What does a typical day consist of for you?

A – A typical day for me, lately, has been kind of hectic, because I'm upstairs working with the probation officers in the Podville area. Some days I have no children who come up and sit in the pods, which is like the detention room. Other days I have them full. Days that I don't have anything, I usually kind of roam around through the building, help teachers out, take kids out on recess, a, you know, watch classrooms and things like that. So, pretty much I kind of float around the building and – used where needed, basically.

K – if you could, describe for me the different roles of, say, the teachers, the probation officers, the counselors, and the courts in the way that the school work.

A – The different roles? Um, the teachers, I'd have to say, are pretty much at the low end of that. You know, your courts are pretty much – are at the top, which go to out probation – our probation officers answer to them. So, it's like, it goes from the court, the probation officers; the probation officers down to the teachers, basically. You know, if we have kids that are on probation and they're in our building, pretty much a lot of the stuff that happens with them is dictated through what the court has to say and what the probation officer has to say, you know. The probation officers and the courts work together, and then they relay it to the teachers, and that's how they decide on what needs to be done with that child, or that student, depending on the situation.

K – So, it's the discipline first and then comes the....

A – Yeah. Basically we do the discipline first – more of trying to get them – the behavior thing under control. And then we try – and also, we, you know, want to educate them. We try to give them something, because, you know, most of these kids will drop out or go get the GED and things like that. But we want to try and educate them as much as we can, but a lot of times we have to deal with the discipline part, you know, the problem area and then the education comes right behind that.

K – What do you see as the purpose of the school?

A – The purpose of the school? I'd have to say a lot of it is just to try to mold these kids in that when they do get out of school, at least they're gonna have some type of self-confidence – some knowledge of what the real world – I call it the real world – what it's going to be like out there. You know, some of these kids feel that, you know, education's nothing, and when they get done, they can do whatever they want. They don't understand that you have bills to pay, you've got, you know, different headaches, and things like that, which, they – a lot of them have now. When you're thrown out in the real world, you know, your parents aren't gonna be there all the time, you've got to find your own place to live, you've got to come up with your own food, you know, things like that. So, we want to try to prepare them for that time when they do get 18 and they decide to get out on their own.

K – How do the students generally come to this school? I mean what are the general offenses, or?

A – General offenses, they range from truancy – you know, not attending school – to anything from, you know, destruction of school property, assaulting teachers, some other things as – things that they've done out on the street from auto theft – all different types of things – but primarily a lot of it is that they've been, I their normal classroom setting, they get in trouble there, they send them to a detention, or a time-out room, they get thrown out of time-out, and we're the next. Pretty much we're – they try to do all the other things first, and then we end up getting them. So it ranges from anywhere from not going to school to what they've done out in – in their other class, normal classrooms, or what they've done out in the street and the court's gotten involved in on it too, so.

K – Do you see similarities in the characteristics of the students that come here, or...?

A – Yeah. I see, um – you know, you've got certain different characteristics that, you know, some – some of the guys that I've noticed already this year they're, you know, rough home life. So they feel that they've got to be bigger, tougher, things like that, and then they go out and do things because there's something going on at home. Some of the girls, it's just kind of ranges with them. Some of the days they're not getting along with mom, or stepfather – things like that. You know, it just kind of ranges. They get together, they form their own little pack and they kind of do things together and they kind of do things together. And that's how they all – some of them end up here, so.

K – How is it determined when a student is ready to go back to their regular school?

A – Some of the students are sent here on – it could be a 5 day, sometimes it's just, you know, they may not be in trouble with the courts, but they're in trouble with their normal school. And they'll say, well, for fighting we want to send them to you for five days instead of expelling them, which, they want them to continue their work. So it kind of ranges. Some kids are sent here long term, that – the normal classroom, they're just tired of dealing with the attitudes, not coming to school, um, you know, they've shoved a teacher or, you know, done something to the extreme, and they'll say, okay, we don't want to have anything to do, we want to get them out, let's put them in a well-structured – in a structured situation, but it's very tight with their, you know, instructions and things like that. There's not a lot of leeway where they can roam around and things like that. We're very set on our rules, and they have to abide by them, or, you know, they're going have to serve some punishment, you know, get some punishment out of it.

K – How often are the families brought in, or parents – when do they come in?

A – Parents come in, they do an intake meeting, which is when a child has been assigned to us, they sit down with the – Mr. Marshall, and they'll have an intake meeting where Mr. Marshall explains the rules, regulations.

K – It's in a private meeting?

A – Yeah. It comes out – it comes in our handbook. He explains that, goes through that. They have to sign some release paper, some medical forms in case something happens, sometimes you get kids, you know, they have asthma, or, you know, some other – seizures and things like that, so we have to take care of that. Occasionally you see parents, or you talk to parents on the phone, you know, because they want to know how their kid's doing school-wise, how's the attitude, you know, they kind of chick in, but not all parents do that – just a select few, because they're getting phone calls, say, from their normal classroom saying we're not getting no work from your son, so they want to check in on it that way. So there's – some parents there's a lot, and some it's very minimal. You know, you see them when they intake kids and that's it. That's the last you see of them, so.

K – In terms of Podville, how is it used? I mean, Mrs. Everett went over it a little bit, but...

A – Okay, Podville is more of a room that kids that are in our building, you know, in the classroom that the teacher just can't handle them anymore. You know, it can range from talking a lot to fighting with other students, so what they send them up to Podville, and we put them in a cubicle, closed in – not a really closed in, but an area that's real small, they sit in the chair, and they have time to sit there to think what they did. You know, we ask questions. What did you do? Why did you do it? You need to cool down. You know, get your thoughts together, things like that. It's a form of, almost a mild punishment. It's like a time-out type, but it's more strict because there's, you know, you can't talk, you can't sleep, you can't do your work, you know, basically you're staring into the wall.

K – It used to actually be painted on the wall, didn't it?

A – Yeah, it was painted on the wall at one time, until they changed them. You know, what did you do, and what can I do to get out of here, you know, and why did I do it. So, and we use that to hold other kids that are on probation that some of the probation officers had to go out, they're skipping school, they had to go get them. So they'll bring them here and hold them until –

K – Do the probation officers actually go out and get the students?

A – Yeah, we had – we've had occasions where some of the kids, you know, they're not at their normal classroom, they're on probation, say, they're still at their normal school, and they're out – they've been skipping a lot. Whereas people have seen them out running around town during the day, during school, so the probation officers have to go out and get them, bring them in – they'll handcuff them, things like that, bring them in and sit them down in Podville until...

K – Like, lock them down?

A – Yeah. Lock them down so that – you know, keep them there, do the paper work, what needs to be done. You know, call the courts, if need be, and things like – that sep court based stuff. So they – not only our kids sit in there, but they also bring other kids outside, you know, that aren't in our building that are on probation, but they bring them in. And then they use Podville in the evenings for CYP and things like that.

K – What exactly is CYP?

A – My understanding – to me it's more of like, more of like a boot camp type thing. I haven't really paid too much attention about it, because the last couple years I've been downstairs teaching, and this year I decided I wanted to get into something different, so this opened up for me. So I haven't really sat and listened to Joe and some of the...

K – Who's in charge of it?

A – Joe Mazzari. They do that in the evenings. It just started this week on Monday, and the kids come in at – I think it's like, I want to say 3:30 until like 6, or something like that, and they do a lot of running, you know, exercises, stuff like that, and it's almost like the form of a boot camp, things like that.

K – Now, do they sign up willingly, or is this something...

A – No, this is something that the probation officers will assign them.

K – Assign them.

A – As – I had a kid yesterday come in. He'd been – he had punched a girl in the face at his school, so Joe went out and got him and brought him in. Filled out the paper work, did what he had to do, assigned him here long term, and then said, CYP starts tonight, you will start reporting for five weeks. So probation officers put them on that. And, pretty much that's the extent of what I know about it. I don't know it all because I haven't really talked to too many people about it.

K – Right. I'll try to see if I can ask him some questions. How effective do you think the discipline that's used here is?

A – Early on, you know, especially coming back from the summer, it's kind of – the kids really don't want to listen to it, but it's more of a – I call it harping on them. The more you get on them – my big thing is tuck the shirts in, and this, this, and this. You know, they don't like it, but by Christmas time, it's become repetitious, and they're finding out that, you know, I need to have this. When I get out, if I start getting a job, I have to look neat, I have to be clean. I'm not saying that when I was in school I left my shirt tucked in and things like that, but with the problems from when I was in school to today, we have to be more cautious about things. The discipline, you see as the year goes on it gets – it starts registering with them. You know, early on they can't stand it. You know, because they've had all summer no discipline. Now all of a sudden they're back in a structured situation, so it takes time for them to adjust – and us to adjust to things. So, it – you notice a difference and the year goes on. Early on it's rough, but later on it gets better with them.

K – In terms of the hiring of the people here – teachers or what have you – are there certain requirements that you have to have? Special requirements or training?

A – The teachers, I know, pretty much are your regular teachers, you know, they just have a better feel for working with kids like this, like Mrs. Springer downstairs. She started out subbing and just working here part time. And she really enjoyed and, you know, she noticed a difference in the kids, she enjoyed working with the kids, so she wanted to stay around here full time. She didn't want to get into a normal classroom

setting. So, things like that. With me, I just happened to work in another Alternative School in another state. When I first got out of college I was subbing, and I worked –

K – Where?

A – In Kentucky. We had an alternative school in the county – in Martin county, which is in the eastern part of the state, we had an alternative school.

K – Was it similar to this?

A – No, it wasn't. It's not as strict. It was just a school that, instead of keeping them in the normal – let's just put them in this building – they had their own separate building like this, but they had no Podville. The discipline, you had to be pretty strict, but not as strict. We didn't have probation officers around, and it was basically an old school, small school, and they just put them there, and just kind of isolated them. So I dealt with kids that way. And then also, working with kids, you know, playing basketball and things like that – that kind of helps. So they look at things like that. Some of the other teachers do have classifications to work these type of kids.

K – Like S – SBH, is it?

A – Yeah, SBH you have to have a certain type of an education, you know, teaching to work with that. And so, it kind of varies, depending on the position and what they're looking for. Some of them, as long as you have a college degree, it doesn't matter what it is, you know, they'll – and they feel that you'll fit in, they'll usually hire you. And – because right now we're looking for some people to fill in, so it just depends on the situation and experience and things like that.

K – What kind of background information do you usually get on the kids that come here?

A – Pretty much everything we need. We – they get, you know, the police reports when the schools say that we have a kid that's in trouble at the school, they send everything in his file to us. So we know what he's done in the school – anywhere from academics to punishment. We look up police records, if there's any files on them, so we know what we're dealing with when they come in. and if we need information, we – you know, the probation officers can widen it out for us. We talk to other probation officer, adult ones, you know, like who's – is their father or mother in trouble, things like that. We can go to the courts and get information, too. So, pretty much whatever is needed, it's usually sent to us. Basically I think he asks for, you know, the academic part, what type of trouble they've been in at the school, why are they being sent to us at the time, and then we check around with probation officers – if they have them on probation or not, and different things.

K – So do you have kids under – that you're their probation officer?

A – Do I? No, I have none

K – You don't have any.

A – No, I don't have any. I'm not a probation officer. I just work with them. I kind of – I'm like the little side person. I just kind of float around. Angie and Misty and them are classified ...

K – Yeah, that's what I...

A – Yeah, so, but, teaching-wise, I got a folder on that child. Every time I got a new kid in my room, I got a folder with all their paper work in it – what I needed to know: address, phone numbers, everything. So I know what type of child I'm dealing with and how to handle it. You know, look back and say, well, he's got a short temper, the slightest thing will tick him off. So if something comes up, I can diffuse that and kind of go a different route to deal with the child.

K – Do you find that some of the students here fit better with this learning style? And can you describe the learning style a little bit?

A – The learning style is laid – not laid back, but it's more of an individual. Teachers, we – they get on them, you know, get your work done, we want you to get your work done, but they don't harp, you know, constantly over their backs. You know, they give them an assignment sheet for the week, and they have to have that assignments done for the week – by Friday. Give it out on Monday and you have your basic – math, science, English, history, heath. And each day is classified. Monday we want you to read this page, you know, do it that way. And they have until Friday to get it done. If they want help, they can ask us. Sometimes kids don't want the help. They like it better because they're more of an individual here. You know, they're not classified as one big group. Kids come in and they like it because it's quieter, it's stricter, and they're going to get their work done. They've got to have that over the top of them.

K – Right. And do they generally get their work done?

A – Most of them do – not all of them. Some of them will spend three or four weeks and not do anything.

K – So what's the penalty for that?

A – If they don't – basically, if they don't start doing work, and if they're on, say the kid's on probation, we'll send them upstairs, they've got to deal with their probation officer. You know, the probation officer will lay more rules on them, you know, house arrest, or different types of punishment for that. I've – get them up in Podville for not doing work – for a week. I'll get them on, like a Monday, and they hadn't done anything the week before, so we'll send them into Podville, and they've got to think about what they've been doing. You know, and you try to talk to them – tell them you've got to have that education, things like that. So, some of the students will do their work because they

want to graduate. They'd just done something stupid outside of here. And then some they really don't care because they know that they're not going to finish school. I mean, kids are GED, or whatever.

K – So they just wait until they're 18 and then they're out of here.

A – Yeah, some are 18, they're like I'm 18, I'm out the door.

K – So what's the rule about that. Once they turn 18, they can't be forced to come to this school?

A – 18, they can sign themselves off and say, you know, I'm 18 now, I'm dropping out of school now. I'm classified as an adult. So they'll have to deal with Mrs. Everett, and the paper work, the school system, say us here, and then they have to deal with, say they're from Mt. Vernon high school, and then they have to deal with them, too, sign papers, and get it all arranged. But we try not to let that happen. We try to encourage them to get GEDs, things like that – at least they got something.

K – Yeah. I don't know if you would know this, but how well do the students fare once they go back to their regular high school?

A – Some kids do fine. Some of them are right back. You know, the young man I got yesterday was just here last week – got released last Thursday. So that means he was in his normal classroom on Friday, and then yesterday was Monday, and he's right back in here yesterday afternoon. So, some kids can go there and they're fine. You may not see them for two, three months. But then some you'll see two weeks later. Depending, you know, they'll go and get in trouble right off the bat, and they're tired of dealing with them. So, teachers have a small tolerance. They can handle it for a while, and then after that it's, you know, one strike, two strikes, and you're out.

K – Do you find that the teachers at the regular high school will be more likely to send them back here faster ...?

A – Yeah, they'll be faster about it, yeah.

K – Watch them, just because they've been here?

A – Yeah, they watch them because they've been sent here once, they know how they are. So when they get back, I do believe that teachers will be a little bit more susceptible to watch them a little bit closer than some of the other students. I mean, I caught myself at times – I'd get rid of one of my students and he'd come back three weeks later and the first time I get him back, I find myself watching over that person a little bit more and being a little bit harder on that one because I, you know, you don't want them back here. You want them to stay out there in the normal classroom. But, it – I think it's just human to do something like that. So, I – sometimes they get back here – sent, you know, back here a little bit quicker.

K – What constitutes a success for you? In terms of personal students, or your dealings with a student?

A – A success for me – just dealing with kids? I'd have to say just watching some of them, at least, you know, when they come in they don't want to do any work. And then if I can get them to start doing some work, and at least trying to strive toward something, you know, get them to think in positive. I had one kid my first year. Out way to connect was just going outside and shooting basketball, because he loved basketball. And he knew that I played college basketball, so he kind of liked that. So, you know, dealing with him in a one-on-one situation – when he came in he was hard-core. He thought, you know, he was hard-core. And the more I talked to him and told him, hey, you know, a little bit at a time, let's get some work, you know, let's work on the academics. Now he's back in the normal classroom setting. I haven't seen him. I've seen him out, you know, in town – things like that. He's tried out for basketball, so he's really, you know, that, to me, is a success. At least seeing somebody going that way, you know, going forward in a positive direction. Even if it's just a little bit, I feel it's a success. With some of the kids, you know, try to sit down and talk to them, try to get them to learn that getting ticked off at every little thing is not worth it. I mean, you know, you try to tell them that you – I can relate to you, because I used to be the same way, you know. You try to tell them some of the things that you've gone through, like short – I mean, I admit it, I had a short temper when I was their age. I mean, the slightest little thing, yeah, every little thing made me mad, and I was punching things, or throwing something. But, when I look back now that I'm older, it didn't get me anywhere, it just caused more problems. So you try to inform them being – you try to let them know that you were that – you know, you've been through it too, you know. You're not the only one out there that's had these struggles too. So, if you can kind of turn the light on upstairs and, you know, get them thinking about things, then I feel like that's success – some success in helping them.

K – Right. Do you set a goal for yourself to keep yourself going and motivated?

A – That's a good question. Not really. I think I just kind of want to come in and do the best job I can. I mean, some days I don't have the best day when I come in, you know. You're tired, you don't want to deal with some of the attitudes that you're going to get, or called some names. But I think every morning I have to tell myself why – why are you doing this? Because you enjoy working with kids. You know, you've got to keep that perspective, but I don't sit and look at set goals, you know, I'm going to try to change some kids – kids aren't going to be changed unless then want to be changed, but I just want to kind of plant little seeds to get them thinking about some things. So, I think every day I just kind of wake up, like, you're tired, bite the bullet, make it through the day, and then when you're done, you can go home, get your nap, and do whatever you've got to do, you know, things like that. So, I think just maybe day by day goals, just to...

K – To keep yourself from burning out?

A – Keep myself – yeah, keep myself from burning out. And it's hard. You get very tired, you know, and you have to have those stress days, as I call them – take a day off, or whatever, but I see every morning I catch myself, you know just thinking, I don't want to go, but I need to be, you know, for me, but the kids also need it, and so that kind of keeps you going, and that's, pretty much – you know, I want to help the kids out. Have a good day. If it's a bad day, turn it into a good day by the end of the day. So, pretty much that's how I look at it.

K – If you could tell me about some of the recent plans for the Alternative School – some of the changes to make it more similar to a traditional school, things that Glen Marshall's doing.

A – He's done a lot. He's changed a lot already, just the way it used to be, you know, moving SBH down to the bottom floor, just to move in the two classrooms up to the main floor keeps us all together. He's trying to be more involved with the other schools, trying to get that way, doing some things like making it known that people are going to, you know, send the kids here, we'll take care, you know we'll take care of your problems. Don't deal with the – have a low-tolerance, we'll take care of the rest type thing. That's the type of improvements – he's trying to upgrade the academic part of it. He's been in and out so much, generally, you got to sit down and talk to him. You know, you do, but you don't – especially with his wife being sick now, I don't know when he'll be back. But, there's been a lot of improvements. Academically I can't really – there has been some, but I can't really say too much because I'm not around it right now too much.

K – Do you like your role better in what you're doing now? Do you feel like you're doing more for the kids?

A – I do and I don't. I don't because I've always had – since I've been here, I have a good reputation with the kids. I mean, I look like them, I dress like them, I can act – not be out of control, but I can kind of go down to their level and, you know, say the things that they say, you know, I can joke – I've always been able to do that. But the position I'm in now, I'm more looked as a bad guy, because I'm running Podville. I mean, to them, that's jail. And I'm the one sitting up here, and I'm the one that's going to be harping on them about sitting straight, no sleeping, no talking – you know, things like that. So it's kind of – it has its good and its bad. I enjoy it because it's a different type of setting now. I'm not in a classroom where I'm grading paper, things like that. Which – there's nothing wrong, I just – but I don't want to lose that type of reputation with them as somebody they can also talk to, but I've got to be strict at the same time. And I think being, looking young, and dressing like they do, and kind of, that kind of fits me in with them. They feel at little bit more comfortable to come talk to me and things like that.

K – Because you're on their level.

A – Yeah. I can, I mean it sounds bad when I say I can stoop to their level, but I know what they're, you know, they're going through. And when I was growing up, I had a friend, you know, somebody like that that could go from being the order or discipline

person to coming down, to being almost like me, and being in that situation. So I want to keep that – so it has its pluses and minuses. Now, today, it's been hectic as ever, but, this is, you know, how it goes, you know. So, I enjoy it. I kind of miss being in a classroom teaching.

K – Now, you were teaching last year?

A – Yeah. I taught last year. I had my own room with some – I had all boys in my room.

K – Okay. What grade level did you have?

A – I had 7th through 12th graders last year.

K – All right, so is that – did you actually get to lecture, or was it...?

A – No, uh, basically what I did was, if I had part-time student who come in for two weeks at a time, their work was sent to me, I give the work, I help them at their desk if they needed me.

K – So you would go around individually?

A – Yeah. Mr. Frost, who's downstairs now, he was my aide, so we just kind of worked – we'd just kind of float around and help people. The long-term kids got their work from the other teachers, the high school teachers, which would have been Mr. Young last year, and Mrs. Muncie. Neither one of them are here this year. Mrs. Muncie moved and Mr. Young retired. So they were in charge of the high school curriculum. So they'd send up what this person would need, you know, pack it in an envelope or whatever, and I'd give it to the student and do the same. Sit down and help them, try to get them stuff, you know, try to get the work done for them. Help them, and you know, answer their questions, things like that. So I never really had to stand up and, you know, stand at the board and do the – you know, because my age group was 7th to 12th graders, so it was so hard to...

K – To be able to teach them all.

A – Yeah, I was helping a seventh grader one minute, and the next, you know, I'm helping a senior, so I couldn't get up and.

K – But the individual attention...

A – Yeah, I gave them individual attention, and if they – some days they didn't want it. You know, that's how they're feeling that day, you know, they didn't take their meds or whatever, so I just kind of let them go, as long as they didn't cause problems, that's how they had to be. But, the people that needed help, I was there to help. So, you kind of – it was different. It's not your normal classroom where you stood up, said okay class, get

out your math books, and let's do this. So, it has its plus and minuses doing that, so I was doing a lot of running around, trying to get their work and things like that.

K – Do you find that separation of the sexes works well?

A – Oh, yeah – definitely. I like it a lot better. My first year here, I had boys and girls, and, you know, I can deal with certain things with the guys, because I'm a male. But there's certain issue that females had that I just couldn't – you know, they felt awkward to talk to me about, which, you know, is very understandable. So I kind of – that was hard to relate there. And that kind of put a lot of stress – I had a female as an aide, so that made it easier, she could deal with the girls. But, you had to deal a lot with the note passing, a lot of wanting to hook-up with each other, you know, hey, meet me after school, this, this and this. You could see them flirting with each other and things like that, so it was hard. Last year I had all boys and I noticed I didn't have a lot of talking a lot of you know, note passing, and you know, they did typical boys things, you know, mess with each other and things like that, which is understandable. But, I think it's a lot better the way they did it.

K – Are there any suggestions that you thing would help with the school, in terms or reform, or ways – directions you see the school can go in to be better?

A – I think it's going in the right direction right now, especially with the new turn-over of some personnel in here. They've upgraded some different aspects of, you know, academics, discipline. Well, just trying to get them, kids, more of structured – it used to be, you know, the kids got 30-something chapters of math, so he's got to take 30-something tests by the end of the year, so they could kind of do it on their own schedule, basically. Now they're structured. They have to have this work done by the end of the week, and they're keeping it...

K – It's weekly still?

A – Yeah, it's weekly instead of yearly, you know, a kid comes in and says, okay, you're long-term, there's three months left of school, where are you in your math at your other school. They'll tell you, okay they'll find it in one of out books, and they'll say okay, you've got 15 chapters, say, to do by the end – when school's out in June. Now that kid doesn't have to do the exercises, none of that stuff – they just have to take the test. So they can do it at their own pace, which I didn't – at times it had, it was good, but most of the time it was bad. Now they're going weekly, like you said, weekly syllabus. You've got to have this work done. If you don't you're going to fall behind, and we're not going to keep pushing you forward.

K – So it's more of the exercises to reinforce what they're learning?

A – They want you to do more of the exercised and then take the test, instead of just taking tests and not worrying about the exercises. Discipline-wise, it's getting a lot stricter. You know, the dress code keep – every year it's getting better.

K – So what's the dress code now?

A – Uh, the baggy stuff's in, but the kids don't wear it around their waist – they wear it around their rear-ends, basically. So those have got to be pulled up over the waist. Shirts tucked in. We're doing more searches – you know, classroom searches, probation officers come downstairs and they're going to search kids...

K – Do they often find stuff?

A – Yeah, we, you know, a lot of times we find lighters, cigarettes, different things like that. Occasionally some drugs, but that's rare. But most of it's cigarettes, lighters, little pocket knives, things like that – stuff that's classified as dangerous.

K – Do they get sent to Podville for that?

A – Yeah, they get sent to Podville, they'll spend time in Podville, and then, depending on if they're on probation – if they're on probation, and most of them are, it's a violation of the probation and it gets written up. And after so many violations, it's back to the judge, and the judge is going to put a stricter sentence...

-----END OF SIDE A-----

K - ...crazy ideas – this is your chance. If you were to have the money, funds, whatever, to do anything you want with this school.

A – Hmm. I'd have to say a computer system. I know the internet's such a big issue, but I think at times it can be used as a good tool. If it's monitored right. I mean, we do have computers here, but there's, you know, certain things – you know, in today's age, a lot of things are run through the computer. When I was growing up, the computer was non-existent. I mean, we knew about it, but they weren't as popular. Some of these kids need to be on the computer to look up research stuff, and the internet sometimes is the only way you can get that information. I'd have to say with the computer system, maybe upgraded, you know, maybe get the internet on one or two of them in certain rooms, but you have to monitor it a little bit more. I'd have to say with the kids, you know, that may here all year, and are having a good year, maybe take them out, a couple field trips, kind of. Do a little bit more, get them out where they're not so isolated in our building. Say, you know, you have a group of kids, let's say ten, that have had a great year – getting their academics done on time, attendance, everything – maybe got off probation. Things like that – you need to reward them some to let them know that, you did all this work, we don't want to put aside, let's reward you a little bit. Because there's going to be rewards when you get out in the, you know, the world, and get in the work force. You've got jobs – there's promotions, pay raises, things like that.

K – They need some kind of compensation.

A – Yeah, so I'd say, you know, get in to that a little bit more. And I say get them involved in the community, too. Have them do some community – some of them do, on probation it's required. Maybe have our school do some stuff with some other school, you know, do some type of community stuff. You know, that way, I'd say bring in a – these kids need physical education. I mean, they need – they've got so much energy, and they sit here all day. Why not have a gym teacher that can come in for an hour, maybe take them down to the Y – last year I know they did that for a while, but it kind of fell by the wayside. They could get a gym teacher in here, and make it enthusiastic for them. Take them down to the YMCA, if the Y would let you borrow the gym for an hour, and take them in there and do some physical exercise. Some of these kids can't do nothing. So, you know, just areas like that is probably what I'd look at – trying to upgrade, things like that. And get some more staff in here to help out, because the probation officer do a lot as it is.

K – Do you think more teachers aides, or?

A – I'd say aides, yeah. Teacher's aides, and stuff like that. Get some more help, just to help with the teaching, because our probation officers do so much as it is, maybe that could help take the load off of them with dealing with kids and things like that, where they're not running up and down, because they've got other things outside of here that they have to get done for kids, you know, kids that are in the normal classroom setting. They could spend more time at Mt. Vernon high school checking in on the ones they need to check in instead of having to worry about what's going on back here. So, that area – a lot of that is what I'd probably do.

K – In terms of – I'm curious about the Alternative School you worked out in Kentucky – how that compares to this and whether it was stronger.

A – It was weaker.

K – Really?

A – Yeah.

K – Discipline-wise?

A – Discipline-wise, yeah. You know, I mean, they didn't have a Podville for the kids. If you had problems with a kid, you were stuck. You had to fight through it, you know. If you get a kid who didn't have his meds, you got – you're in for a fight for the day. I mean you had other teachers there, but they didn't have teacher's aides, like we do here. You know, for them, you know, if you have a major problem, you'd have to call the police to bring them in, and sometimes they'd take 10, 15 minutes to get that person. You know, the kid could run out of the classroom and you're in – out the building – you're in trouble, you're by yourself. You can't leave your other kids in there because they may jet on you. So, it's a lot weaker discipline-wise, in that area. Academic-wise, probably a little bit weaker. I think they just did what they had to do to get a kid done. I

noticed, you know, it's just kind of rush the kid through it and let's get him out of here. So, and some days they'd waste days and just send them outside all day as one big school, and there's – not as many as there are here – say about 20 of them, and they'd have field day all day. They'd play basketball, softball – it was almost kind of like a wasted day. Teachers didn't want to do anything type stuff. So, it was totally different.

K – Do you like the way this school works?

A – Oh, yeah. Yeah, because, you know, if you have problems and you can't deal with it – and not everybody can handle all the problems – it's nice to have other people around that's going to help you out. Plus I notice the staff here, everybody gets along. I mean, at times you guys get frustrated with each other, but we all get along. We like to mess with each other, joke around, you know, pull little pranks – that keeps things lively for us. But we're always there to help the other one, you know, regardless of, you know, how we're feeling that day. If somebody needs your help, I'm going to go help them because they need – you know, so we get along, we don't get upset. What does that teacher need my help for, you know, but, you know, because we know they're going to help us later on some other time when we need the help. So I really enjoy it here. Everybody's fun to be around – goofy bunch. The kids – and some of the kids are great to be around. You can see there's good in them, they just happen to be down the wrong path right now. So, it's fun. I can't complain, I guess.

K – Is there anything else you'd like to add?

A – Ahhhh....

K – Or any questions...?

A – Are you sure you want to do this?

K – I was just going to say any questions that you have for me.

A – No, I can't think of any right now. Now you definitely will go into this? This is what you are going to do?

K – Oh, me personally as a career? Um, I don't know if I'm going to do Alternative School – I'm looking to have kids, whether it's a social worker, working – I'd have more fun playing sports and stuff like that. I've been a camp counselor, I've substitute taught, I've done, you know, all that stuff, but I found that you connect the best when you're just hanging around, and hanging out and being, I guess how you put it, down to their level, or whatever it is. And, I don't know, that's the way I think you can get things across to them more effectively.

A – You know, I agree with you. You know, sports – a lot of these kids do like sports. You know, when they find out that you play a sport or you enjoy – you know, I bring in basketball magazines to read. You know, they start talking about teams and stuff, so you

can start, yeah, well, you know, Ohio State's going to be, you know, pretty good, and they'll start naming off players. You'll be shocked at first, but then you're thinking, hmm, we're connecting here.

K – Yeah, it's an ice-breaker.

A – Yeah, basically. And then, like you said, you enjoy being – doing stuff. I worked at basketball camps for summers, and that's how you connect with the kids. You know, you use that sport, and then you start building a relationship and a friendship that way with that child. And, you know, I'll go outside and I'll play basketball with them out here in the parking lot, and I'll talk a little trash with them, because they'll talk to me – Oh, you're too old Mr. Reynolds – Oh, you wanna bet? – you know, and things like that. So, I agree with you there. It's just getting to their level. Not, you know, being stupid, but, you know, being able to talk to them at their 17, 18-year-old level.

K – Exactly. And not trying to be above them.

A – Right. You know, some of them think that. That's what I'm saying. Being up here in Podville, they think, well, you know, you – he's a big jerk, or whatever, he's up there. But there's times when I'll get them up here and I'm angered at them, or they'll be in here pulling stunts, but then I can sit out here on the front porch with them waiting for the bus and I can give them a high five and joke around and say hey, have a good day today. Don't get in trouble at home, now. And they'll be like, all right, no problem, and everything's fine, so I feel comfortable about that. I just don't want them to think, oh he's just one big jerk. I want them to know I have a job to do. But also, I can – you know, be lenient about some things too and be able to talk to them and you want my – if you want respect, then you've got to give me respect and let's just kind of go that way. Other than that, that's about it.

K – Is there anyone that you suggest that I talk to? I know you said Joe Mazzari.

A – Joe Mazzari – he's the one, he does CYP. He's a – office where Charlie and them and Mike ----- . Yeah, it's on the left with, you know, the last one on the left, and if you go in and go straight, you'll see his desk. He'll be facing you if he's there. He does CYP.

K – Is he involved in -----?

A – Yeah, he's a probation officer, too. He does some other things, I'm not too sure. Angie Bebow would be another good one too.

K – Angie – what's her last name?

A – Bebow. She's over there on the other side of the carrel with Misty and all them. She's great because she has some different area that she covers here. She's a probation officers, but she does some other things for the probation department and stuff like that.

Fundings, you know, getting grants and stuff like that to help put kids in detention center and stuff like that, so she'd be a good one to talk to.

K – Okay. Thank you.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----